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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000156

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KCOR](#) [VM](#) [KPAO](#)
SUBJECT: HANI RATCHETS UP PRESSURE ON PRESS

Ref: A) HANOI 296; B) HANOI 2705; C) HANOI 2412; D) HANOI 771

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ummary

1. (SBU) Politburo member Truong Tan Sang recently called on the Communist Party of Vietnam to strengthen "management of the press" by amending legal documents on press activities and improving media workers' "political stances, skills and ethics." Sang's speech followed several high-profile GVN measures aimed at disciplining the press. Between a general public that is increasingly interested in and concerned about corruption, and a local press that is under pressure to care about its readership and the bottom line, GVN and Party leaders have a tough row to hoe: allow the press to play a role in taking on corruption, but only in a way that does not threaten Party supremacy and government stability. End Summary.

rawing a Line in the Sand

2. (SBU) On January 9, Politburo member Truong Tan Sang gave a speech calling on the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) to strengthen "management of the press" by amending legal documents on press activities and improving media workers' "political stances, skills and ethics." Sang gave the speech at the conclusion of a two-day CPV conference on "press management" in Quang Ninh Province. After detailing the positive role the media has played in Vietnam's socioeconomic development, Sang said that the Party "must enhance its leadership role" in appointing and recruiting media workers.

3. (SBU) The Party Central Committee's Commission for Ideology and Culture, the Ministry of Culture and Information (MOCI) and the Vietnam Journalists' Association also presented reports at the conference on the media situation in Vietnam. These reports listed some media outlets' "weaknesses," which included showing signs of "power abuse" and publishing "negative phenomena" without "following exemplary models." These presentations also called for more training for media workers.

Cracking Down for "Disobeying Government Orders"

4. (SBU) Sang's speech follows recent GVN measures to reassert control over the media. For example, in November 2006, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung ordered tighter GVN control over the media and pledged not to privatize the press (Ref A). Also in late 2006, MOCI slapped a one-month ban on two small publications -- one under the administration of the Supreme People's Court and the other under the supervision of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Associations -- for "violating articles in the Press Law and disobeying government orders" (Ref B). Both publications ran a series of articles highlighting misprints and other problems with the State Bank of

Vietnam's new plastic bank notes, which replaced Vietnam's paper notes. For example, stories alleged that the State Bank Governor's son had profited from the printing contract. MOCI also fined eight other newspapers for publishing articles that had "false information" on the introduction of new bank notes.

15. (SBU) Similarly, in late 2006 another popular publication, The World ("The Gioi"), got in trouble for publishing readers' letters that criticized GVN leaders for their failings on corruption. The GVN banned The World from publishing more letters because they were "out of line with the objectives of the publication."

Press Increasingly Interested in the Bottom Line

16. (SBU) Senior Colonel Tran Nhung, a leading journalist at the Veterans Affairs Journal, told us that Sang's speech reflected Party concern that media outlets have not been "sufficiently enthusiastic" about running stories that reflect or support GVN policy. For example, GVN officials were "annoyed" that only a few newspapers were interested in reporting GVN criticism of Vietnam-related human rights legislation in the U.S. Congress. Ironically, the reason for this diminished enthusiasm is that the local press and media are increasingly under pressure from their State, Party or Government parent organizations to become financially independent and commercially profitable. They will naturally seek to print what their readers want, and these days, articles on corruption and related matters are popular subjects, Nhung explained.

Comment

17. (SBU) Sang's speech appears to be part of a larger Party and GVN campaign to ensure that the press does not stray beyond established redlines. However, between a general public that is increasingly interested in and concerned about corruption, and a local press that is under pressure to care about its readership and the bottom line,

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GVN and Party leaders have a tough row to hoe: allow the press to play a role in taking on corruption, but only in a way that does not threaten Party supremacy and government stability. End Comment.

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